



UNDERSTANDING ELECTIONS & CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

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Transcript

[TEXT: YOUNG AFRICAN LEADERS INITIATIVE
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Hi, my name is Buffy Wicks and this is Grassroots Organizing For Civic Engagement.

We're going to talk about the basics of grassroots organizing. Organizing, fundamentally, is about building power in order to make change. Grassroots organizing is when ordinary citizens are the force behind the effort to make that change.

In this lesson we'll review how grassroots organizing applies to an electoral campaign. We'll also look at how it can be used for a social movement, like women's rights or access to quality education.

There are three key elements to any grassroots campaign: leadership, capacity building, and executing your plan.

The most critical component of grassroots organizing is great leadership. Leaders have a plan, with specific goals, a timeline, and clearly defined measures of success. Leaders bring people together. They provide vision and ensure that everyone is working in common purpose and that everyone knows their respective roles. They create infrastructure for their cause by delegating specific tasks to others. They do what they say and give others a chance to be successful.

No movement can succeed without good leaders.

Another critical component of a successful campaign is the ability to create capacity. Creating capacity means to draw more and more people into your campaign, both at the leadership level and developing a list of supporters. We call this "list building."

Your list of supporters is critical. You must cultivate this list, adding more and more committed supporters each day. They understand your cause and have agreed to be supportive. This agreement can be a verbal communication – a one-on-one meeting or phone conversation – or a written communication via social media, text message, email or letter. Supporters know that they will be asked to do something in the future for your campaign and they will. For instance, vote for a particular candidate on Election Day. You should have contact



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information for your supporters so you can communicate with them regularly and provide updates. Celebrate good news with your supporters as your campaign progresses, and inform them of any big announcements. You should prepare your supporters so that they know there will be peaks and valleys in your campaign. And they should know that their support, especially in the more difficult times of the campaign, is absolutely critical. Depending on your technological capacity and the size of the campaign you are participating in, you can keep this list on paper, or on your computer in a spreadsheet or database. Social media applications like Whatsapp and Facebook are very good ways to communicate with your supporters quickly.

Over the course of your campaign, you should test your capacity. Develop programs with clear goals, designed to increase the number of supporters and test the capacity of people involved. Ask supporters to show up at a rally. Ask them to recruit their friends and neighbors. Ask them to host an event to discuss the campaign and sign up more supporters. As you progress through these tasks, you will get a better sense of who your most reliable supporters are. These are the people you should cultivate to be leaders in your movement. You will rely on them to help with your get-out-the-vote efforts if you are organizing for an electoral campaign. If you are organizing for an issue campaign, these are the people you will turn to to help advocate to elected officials. These are your reliable, trusted supporters and they should be given a leadership role in the final phase of the campaign.

In the final push of your campaign, make sure your leaders and supporters understand with perfect clarity what their role is. You can designate people for specific tasks, such as becoming neighborhood or village captains. They will be responsible for ensuring all of your supporters in a community vote on Election Day. You can designate someone as your social media captain, who will be responsible for pushing out your message in the days leading up to Election Day via Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp or other social media platforms.

Here are a few tips for using social media. Social media serves as an important vehicle to spread your message. As with any other format, your social media communications should tell the story of your campaign or your candidate. Facebook is a great platform to share graphics, photos and video content of your candidate or your issue. If you are doing video content, it's best to keep it short and sweet – usually no more than one minute. The most effective videos are the ones that evoke an emotional response that speak to people's core values. Twitter is best to move out quick messages about taking action. In both situations, you want to create content that people want to share with their networks. You should maintain an active social media presence for the duration of the campaign, cultivating your list of followers and using social media as a way to communicate directly to your supporters.

By the time you get to the final phase of your campaign you should have developed leaders, built your list of supporters, tested your capacity and be executing on getting your message out. Your supporters should know when it's time to go vote, show up, speak up, or whatever





your campaign has been building towards. The final “ask” should be crystal clear and have been repeated hundreds of times, via social media, neighbor-to-neighbor word of mouth, and to the broader community. It should be like a constant drum beat. Hopefully, you’ll be rewarded with success and can celebrate your grassroots organizing achievement.

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